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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the new trends geared toward providing educational services to prisoners in correctional institutions. Correctional educators are attempting to help prisoner/students identify realistic goals and to develop the necessary coping skills to achieve them. The average age and educational level of federal prisoners has increased. (The average age of federal incarcerated offenders is 30 years, the average educational achievement level 9.7 years. Forty percent of the population have completed at least the twelfth grade and only 5% have not completed at least the eighth grade. Fifty percent of federal prisoners have an "average" intelligence score and 37% have an above average score; 13% test at lower than average. It is estimated that between 40 and 50% lack a marketable skill.) Correctional learning centers are much better equipped with the latest equipment to be used as instructional materials. Many states have now formed correctional school districts, which have a built-in provision of funds and related support by State Departments of Education. Efforts are being made to discourage prisoners from enrolling in these vocational and educational programs only to impress their parole boards. Correctional institution contracts with individual teachers, community and junior colleges, area vocational-technical schools, and universities to provide instructions are increasing. Increased service such as wider ranges of courses and library uses are being encouraged. Staff development is a major thrust area for personnel working with correctional institution educators. (WL)

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Changing Times for the Adult Correctional Educator *

The occasion of the Bicentennial has provided many people with the necessary impetus to reflect on the past and to plan for the future. Correctional educators have not escaped this syndrone. In at least one respect, correctional education is no different from education in general. We tend to react to fads and fashions, but on balance, basic programs continue to meet the needs of most of the students. Additionally, sometimes what we think is a passing fancy proves fundamentally sound and is absorbed into the basic structure of educational programming.

Education continues to be criticized widely; sometimes fairly and sometimes unfairly. Many critics of educatior want it to make up for all the deficiencies in the family, in the neighborhood, and in society in general. Education and, of course, correctional education can make a contribution to an

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individual's socialization but it cannot be expected to make up for the life-long and complex economic, social, physical and emotional disadvantages and disabilities of so many of the students with whom we come in contact. Despite all these considerations, correctional educators are in a stronger position than ever before to make a significant contribution to helping prisoner/students identify realistic goals and to develop the necessary coping skills to achieve them. Let's review some of the conditions under which we are now working which provide us with the capacity to offer educational opportunities that we were not able to provide just a short 10 years ago.

Demographic Characteristic of Students

The average age of federal incarcerated offenders is around 30 years. (actually 29.8) 1/ The average educational achievement level, as of June 1976, is 9.7 years. In the federal prison system 40% of the population have completed at least the twelth grade and only 5% have not completed at least an 8th grade education.

1/ U.S. Bureau of Prison statistics. The comparable figure for 1972 is 30.8 years

Fifty percent of the federal prisoners have an "average" intelligence score and 37% have an "above average" score; only 13% test at lower than average. 2/ We estimate that between 40 and 50% lack a marketable skill.

The picture is probably similar in many States, although overall educational achievement levels may be somewhat lower. These demographic characteristics of prisoners substantially affect the mission of correctional education. We must continue to provide adult basic literacy and, of course, high school equivalency (GED) courses. However, a program which does not include postsecondary courses and relevant occupational training has nothing in it for close to fifty percent of incarcerated offenders.

While precisely comparable base year data is not available, we estimate that the average age of incarcerated offenders is somewhat higher than ten years ago and the corresponding average educational achievement levels are also higher.

2/ Tables titled "Population by Highest Grade Completed" and "Populations by I.Q. Scores". Bureau of Prisons computer print-out dated February 2, 1976

Instructional Environments and Materials

In addition to changes in demographic characteristics of incarcerated offenders changes have also taken place in correctional institutions themselves and more particularly in facilities devoted to education.

Learning centers with electronically equipped study carrels, mobile video tape recorders (VTR), sound-on-slide bilinqual vocational training materials and other innovations coupled with well appointed classrooms, instructors and teacher-aides can now be found in many correctional education centers.

Not very long ago most of us were painfully aware of the fact that while we had a wide variety of new multi-media equipment the software was in no way equal to the potential of the equipment. We have witnessed a very significant improvement in this situation. Such pioneer groups as The Manpower Education Institute and, more recently, the Kentucky

Educational Television System have provided us with excellent GED audio-visual instructional materials. Similiarly social education, occupational and postsecondary education materials are available in a wide variety of multi-media formats. Bilingual instructional materials were very rare until recently. We now have available Spanish language versions of GED and some occupational materials. These have been developed commercially and by individual instructors. Funds to purchase equipment and instructional materials continues to be a problem. However, where funds can be generated good VCR equipment is available and neat, almost people-proof cassettes, have replaced the difficult reel to reel tapes which frequently broke or got tangled up or somehow didn't work when we most needed them. The emerging technology has made it possible, in some of the newer Metropolitan Correctional Centers, for example, to provide education programs from a central station to different floors in the institution. We still have our "down" time problems but certainly we are in a stronger position from an

equipment and instructional materials standpoint than ever before. This is one of many changes which has worked to our advantage.

The School District

Another very significant change in recent years has been the establishment of correctional school districts. The early efforts of States which embraced this new system around eight years ago are taking hold and are expanding. One of the great strengths of this new structure is the built-in provision of funds and related support by State Departments of Education. I view this innovation as one of the most significant in correctional education during the past decade and one which needs to be evaluated currently so that the extension and expansion of the school district concept will reflect the experiences we have all shared over these past years. It would be unfortunate, in my opinion, to continue to create these school districts in additional States without the benefit of careful evaluation of our experiences to-date.

Voluntarism

Still another change can be summed up in the term "voluntarism".

We are all familiar with the eager student who enrolls in a wide variety of programs with one eye on the program title and the other on parole. Enrollments are timed to make an impression on staff and parole authorities rather than to acquire coping and occupational skills necessary for post release survival. The federal and other correctional systems are trying to discourage this kind of participation in education and training programs and to motivate prisoner/students to become involved only in those programs which serve a real need. These efforts have been labeled "voluntarism". As I view this change it means more and higher quality education and training programs in all correctional facilities as we try to meet the genuine interest and needs of prison populations.

Meeting Individual Needs

In an effort to meet the needs of all students profound changes have taken place throughout corrections. Correctional staffs and administrators are more sensitive to the need for flexible education and training programs which are currently relevant. As a result instructional contract services have increased either through contracts with individual teachers, nearby community and junior colleges, area vocational-technical schools and/or other educational institutions and individuals.

Additionally, the growth of postsecondary education programs in prisons has been very important. Ten years ago no correctional institution provided the opportunity to work toward a Bachelor's Degree and few, if any, offered a two year degree. 3/ Today we estimate that between 15,000 and 20,000 prisoners are enrolled in college courses, most of which are part of degree programs.

3/ McCollum, S. G. "Postsecondary Education Programs for Prisoners" International Encyclopedia of Higher Education 1976.

We have seen substantial increases in special programs for minorities such as Black Study programs, American Heritage programs, English as a Second Language (ESL), bilingual vocational and other programs, and, of course, "special" programs for women offenders. All of these efforts reflect, in one way or another, this growing awareness and responsiveness of correctional administrators and educators to individual needs.

Expanding Definition of Adult Education

The definition of education in correctional institutions has also been changing. The change mirrors, in part, the definition of adult education in the larger community and we welcome the new and expanded definition. Adult education is longer defined in terms of basic literacy, GED preparation or occupational education. Programs now include social education, the visual and performing arts, physical education and leisure time and recreational programs. The National Endowment of the Arts, Children's Television Workshops and scores of other governmental and private groups

have contributed to this broader concept of education in prisons.

Libraries

I don't want to leave the subject of expanding definitions of adult education without a special word about books and libraries in prison. LeDonne's (1974) critical evaluation of prison libraries identified some important issues. 4/ In the federal system we have been moving toward greater availability of paperback books in living quarters. In this connection we've been tremendously assisted by the Women's Committee of Brandeis University. This Committee, under the able leadership of Mrs. Albert Berler, has generated donations by book distributors of literally thousands of "free" paperback books to federal correctional facilities throughout the country. Mobile library units, inter-library loan arrangements as well as legal reference and general purpose reference libraries combine to try to meet library needs in most prisons.

4/ LeDonne, M. "Survey of Library and Information Problems in Correctional Institutions". Washington, D. C. U. S. Office of Education, H.E.W. January 1974.

Staff Training

All these changes and more yet to come underscore the importance of in-service staff training for correctional educators. Any correctional system which does not provide continuous professional growth opportunities for staff is missing a great opportunity to increase its effectiveness. Meetings such as these to which we can come and learn from each other are very important. Structured, formal education programs which expose us to new instructional materials and methods are also very important. In the federal system we regard staff training as a priority matter and encourage staff to become actively involved in such training. In 1976 the Bureau of Prisons, in cooperation with Ohio State University, held five regional workshops for vocational educators and we are in the process of developing additional structured staff training opportunities and materials for the coming year.

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Conclusion

The challenges and opportunities inherent in the changes we have been reviewing are self evident. Correctional educators who are expecting tomorrows just like yesterdays will not feel comfortable. The only certain characteristic in correctional education today is "change". Like educators generally, we are not always sure that the changes are for the better but they seem unavoidable. Moreover, the rate of change is accelerating, and so sharing experiences and ideas is more important than ever. The Correctional Education Association is providing some much needed leadership as we prepare together to meet these changes.